

VZCZCXYZ0002  
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHGB #0362/01 0421129  
ZNY SSSSS ZZH  
R 111129Z FEB 10 ZDK  
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 6564  
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE  
RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE

S E C R E T BAGHDAD 000362

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/11/2020

TAGS: [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [IZ](#) [IR](#)

SUBJECT: PRT WASIT: BA,ATH DISQUALIFICATION REACTION AND  
ELECTION CAMPAIGNING IN WASIT,S SHIA HEARTLAND

Classified By: PRT Wasit TL Kevin Blackstone for Reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (S) Summary and Comment: Wasit,s largely Shia population supported attempts to disqualify former Ba,athists from the upcoming national elections, although there was also a perception that the disqualification process was politicized and posed risks. No prominent candidates were affected in Wasit and no major political group threatened boycotts. Reaction to Vice President Biden,s visit to Baghdad was measured. Some local analysts and political leaders believe Iranian influence was partly responsible for the disqualification push. Finally, ISCI and Sadrist Trend groups appear to be well-financed and have allegedly begun to campaign and distribute largesse in poor and rural communities where their support is strongest. Anecdotal evidence suggests that Iran is providing significant financial support to these groups, although the PRT is unable to confirm this. End Summary and Comment.

¶2. (S) Reaction in Wasit Province to the Accountability and Justice Commission,s decision to disqualify approximately 500 candidates from upcoming COR elections broke down along predictable lines. Wasit,s overwhelmingly Shia population (90%) largely supported the disqualifications, but better educated and middle-class Shia along with supporters of the smaller (in Wasit) secular parties such as the Constitution party, Iraqi Nation party, and small Wasit-PUK office, suggested the politicized nature of the move and expressed mixed feelings about the decision to PRToffs. Nineteen of Wasit,s 297 candidates were affected by the AJC,s January decision, none of whom were especially prominent or had significant name recognition apart from one Iraqi National List (INL) leader, Majid Hussein Qumar, who was a senior military officer under the old regime. Even the INL was somewhat muted in its public reaction, although INL party director Majid Latif Abd al-Sadr told the PRT that the eleventh-hour move was a terrible development and risked sparking violence and negatively affecting the election,s credibility with many Iraqis. Neither the INL nor affiliated groups planned to boycott the election. Only the Southern Tribal Council, not a significant political player, had publicly threatened a boycott prior to February 3.

¶3. (S) Leaders from several parties, including the Constitution party (Mohammed Maza,al Khadem Khulati), Iraqi Nation party (Dr. Naja Nasser), and PUK (Saleh al-Rekabi), spoke with PRToffs about the disqualifications and echoed general concerns about what they viewed as a politicized Commission that was not independent and had partisan leanings. Both the Constitution and Iraqi Nation parties each had a female candidate reinstated after appeals involving confusion over names/identities, and party leaders opined that other innocent candidates across Iraq were likely affected. They welcomed the subsequent ruling of the Appeals court. These parties also expressed concern about what they described as overt Iranian attempts to influence election results in favor of the religious parties.

¶4. (S) Dr. Khadem, the Director of Wasit,s Governorate Electoral Office (GEO) (the province,s branch of Iraq,s

Independent High Electoral Commission), normally at pains to avoid partisan political discussions, addressed the issue with the PRT, lamenting developments which have split Iraqis along sectarian lines in the weeks before the election. Khadem warned PRToffs that American influence was waning in Iraq at a critical moment because of U.S. reluctance to openly or publicly challenge Iran,<sup>8</sup> and that this dynamic was not lost upon Shia in southern Iraq.

¶5. (C) The former PC Chairman Mohammed Hassan Jabber (an independent Shia) told PRToffs that poor, uneducated Shia did not understand the national ramifications the move might have and supported it due to a knee-jerk reaction against anything related to the Ba'ath. He alleged that ISCI activists had prepared their supporters in poor and rural communities for months in order to take maximum political advantage of the situation, and posited this as evidence that Iranian influence was a major (but not sole) factor in the Commission's decision. (Comment: Jabber is a moderate and has contacts across the political spectrum. He is centrist in his views and an intelligent observer. The PRT does not believe that Jabber views ISCI as a mere puppet of Iran, but as an organization that is nonetheless susceptible to Iranian influence. End Comment.) Other Wasit politicians, such as Dawa Director Faras Ali Askar, who supported the disqualifications, have also indirectly suggested that foreign influences played some role in the current situation. Wasit's reaction to the Vice President's Jan. 22-23 visit to Baghdad was measured. Several PRT contacts, including Jabber, referred to what they saw as the irony of Washington opposing de-Ba'athification measures originally begun by the United States.

¶6. (S) Meanwhile, there are allegations that de facto ISCI/Sadrist and Dawa campaigning has begun in Wasit well in

advance of the ostensible February 7 start date. According to several sources, including PRT LE staff, Salam Hamid Preibet (a Wasit academic and political analyst), Jabber, and Khadem, some Iraqi National Alliance (INA) candidates and activists have held barbecues and meals in various rural areas, possibly distributing political literature at these events. INA candidates have also reportedly distributed clothes and school supplies at several Wasit schools. In mid-January, Sajadah Nazar, a female ISCI PC member and COR candidate, sought a private meeting with the PRT's Poloff in which she asked the PRT for additional school supplies which could be directly distributed by herself on the PC's behalf\*-since, she said, the PC best knew where and how to get the supplies quickly to the neediest students. Sajadah requested the supplies NLT Jan. 20-25 in order to meet an unspecified academic semester timeline. It appears that, along with the State of Law coalition, the INA is well-financed in Wasit and capable of spending a significant amount to generate voter support and interest. Most PRT contacts cited in this report and street-level conventional wisdom suggest that nowhere is alleged Iranian influence more evident than in the sudden influx of money to and enhanced capabilities of the Shia religious parties.

¶7. (S) Khadem, the GEO Director, confirmed to PRToffs February 4 that the Dawa party had committed the first verified campaign violations (literature and posters), and that an official report had been sent to IHEC headquarters in Baghdad. Khadem was more reluctant to discuss alleged INA violations, but told PRToffs that he was investigating school giveaways in rural areas. Khadem said that certain political parties had received money which they attempted to distribute to religious pilgrims through Mukab charitable organizations in exchange for political support. The Mukabs in question refused to cooperate and reported the activity. However, Khadem said it was almost impossible to know how many other organizations might be cooperating in such schemes, and where the money came from.

¶8. (S) Comment: The INA's apparent ability to penetrate Wasit's countryside with giveaways and assistance will almost certainly guarantee a good turnout and support on March 7. The PRT cannot confirm nor discredit allegations that Iranian money is involved, but the perception in Wasit that this is happening is widespread. The State of Law

coalition is the only other group with the resources to match this effort. Voter apathy among urban and more educated Shia voters may play as large a role in the final results as money, however. Almost without exception, PRT contacts in this group express disenchantment with Iraq,s current political situation and are skeptical and turned off by what they perceive to be widespread corruption and runaway self-interest among most candidates and parties. The secular parties have an opportunity to tap into this disaffection and encourage greater support/participation from urban, middle-class and professional Iraqis.

HILL